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THE MISAPPLICATION OF KINDERGARTEN METHODS TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

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THE advocacy of pedagogical principles as the foundation of Sunday-school work by an increasing number of earnest students has been misinterpreted by many Sunday-school teachers to mean the adaptation of the Sunday school to the plans and methods of the weekday school. As a consequence, confusion and work unworthy of the name of the Bible school have arisen, and with them an unfortunate prejudice against a true educational movement in the Sunday school. Such misconceptions as are signified by the following illustration need to be overcome: "Better to have the inefficient teacher whose teaching touches the heart of the child, than the trained worker whose intellectual teaching has no spiritual influence." In response to this remark, made at a gathering of teachers, two questions arose: Would the teacher who touches the heart of the child in an effective way *be* "inefficient"? Would the *trained Sunday-school teacher* hold anything of greater import than the training of the spiritual life? That would be preëminently the work to which he would be trained. Emphasis may well be given to the words of Rev. James A. Blaisdell:¹ "The agitation for better methods is fundamentally an agitation for a method which shall lay more vital hold upon the soul."

The misinterpretation referred to above is largely due to a lack of discrimination between principles and methods. Said Professor John Dewey, in a kindergarten conference, some time ago: "If these principles are true for the kindergarten, they are true for the university; if not true for the university, they are fictitious for the kindergarten." In the present connection

¹ In the *Congregationalist*, May 18, 1901.

we may logically add: If certain principles are true for the kindergarten, they are true for the Sunday school; if not true for the Sunday school, they are fictitious for the kindergarten. That which is accepted as fundamentally true cannot be limited to one place or work.

The education of the home, the school, and the Sunday school needs to be grounded on the same basis, for the development of strong, harmonious character. Dwarfed, twisted, and unbalanced natures are often the result of contradictory planes of action in the training of child life.

But the full appreciation of the pedagogical principles of today leads of necessity to a difference in method in the several places, for by this we see that conditions determine the ways in which a principle shall be applied.

Arguing in favor of the same Bible lesson for children of all ages, especially for the sake of united home study, a leading Sunday-school worker once said: "You kindergartners uphold *unity* as the one essential principle." Apparently there was no distinction made here between unity—a principle to be applied to the spirit of the whole, and touching the natural relationship of one part to another—and uniformity, a method which uses the one form for all parts of the whole! The one we always need, the other is the bane of all good work.

It is this distinction that needs emphasis as we consider the influence of the kindergarten upon the primary Sunday school. The working principle and general method may be the same in both places; the particular method needs often to be different. For instance, growth by self-action, be it physical, mental, or spiritual, has become an accepted truth and a working principle; from this must naturally follow the general method of giving something to do—some means for the expression of impressions. Play with blocks as one means of expression has become a particular method in the kindergarten; must we adopt this special method in the primary Sunday school? We think not. The conditions, or the necessary environment, must be considered in selecting what to use and what not to use. The amount of time, the character of the place, and the special day

will all affect the question. As to time, there is one hour (in single cases three hours), as compared with fifteen hours per week. The same means for the development of truth cannot, therefore, be successfully used, for lack of time forbids it. As regards place and day, should not there be rightly cultivated in little children a reverential distinction between the Sunday and the weekday kindergarten? If so, the Sunday child-garden in harmony with educational principles is possible without the use of the kindergarten materials. For this, what do we need to do first? To make sure that the subject-matter to be given is within the experience of the child with whom we have to do. The kindergarten has taught the Sunday school to go from the known to the unknown, but with a shallow appreciation of this truth the method employed has been to have a familiar introduction or an incidental connection well known to the child, and to pass from that to what is entirely beyond his experience. As if the "point of contact" is like a hitching-post on which any good thing may be fastened so long as the post is familiar! If we find and let the child see spiritual truth out of his everyday experiences, using the Bible pictures of human life in relation to this, our method will accord more nearly with the principle tried and proved.

The kindergarten has said to the Sunday school: Let little children see spiritual truth in the concrete, not the abstract, form—they deal with things *more* than words. Yet this does not mean that *all* truth is to be objectified. To attempt to materialize the spiritual often detracts from, or even destroys, the end in view. Children enter into the wonderful and the mystical with a vision of faith lost entirely to adult life. How we crucify the highest ideals by material representations! And this in the name of the kindergarten! How we fill the mind with the picturing of incidentals, leaving no room for the spiritual impression! An earnest teacher "thinks she is doing God service," according to "the new kindergarten ideas," by dressing a doll in oriental swaddling clothes to represent the Christ Child in the manger! A copy of the Sistine Madonna and Child would have been less objective, but of more value to the true

kindergartner, because *in itself* it would deepen the spiritual suggestion, and would also impress the main thought of the time; it is dangerous to dwell on details with little children: distraction is apt to be the result. The writer, who was an eyewitness to the above, might have supposed that all such work had passed away in eight years, and yet instances like the following have been evident within as many months: the "holy of holies" represented, and to be seen by lifting a flimsy little veil; the Israelites crossing a looking-glass sea on a "real mud bridge;" and even the garden of Gethsemane shown in concrete imagery! When such work is given by one bearing the name of kindergartner, the uninitiated are naturally led to believe that such work fulfils the kindergarten idea.

Perhaps one reason for such representations is found in the fact that the subject-matter is often so foreign to the little child that the teacher in sheer despair seeks some means of interest, some method by which to bring it to the child level. And the mistaken impression of the adult is that the child is interested in such lessons—no matter what the critics say! Let us investigate as to the *point* of interest; it may be absorbed with that pretty veil.

How, then, is the concrete rather than the abstract to be used? With little children it is better to take some object from nature in which a spiritual truth is embodied, rather than to select a truth and then work hard to enframe it in some object of manufacture. An illustration may make this clear: in plant life, under certain conditions, the law of sacrifice, the resurrection truth, and that of individual character and responsibility may be seen, and words of Scripture may sum up these; on the other hand, a magnifying glass to make clear the meaning of "My soul doth magnify the Lord," three blocks to personify "love, trust, and obey," and paper "fishes" in relation to "fishers of men" are hindrances rather than helps to an appreciation of the truth.

When the material environment of the story is so essential to its appreciation that it needs to be impressed, it is well to represent it by things. This is especially true when the material

environment is different from the child's usual surroundings. For instance, with such a subject as the man sick of the palsy, who was let down through the roof to be healed by Christ, the picturing of an oriental house would be of value ; but if a fence has a place in a lesson and it is as familiar to the children as to the teacher, there is no use in stopping to make one. As the child grows to the age of eight to ten years, and the descriptive element has a larger interest, sand, blackboard, etc., will be more needed than in the earlier days.

We return naturally now to the general method suggested above, viz., of "giving something to do." Instead of using even kindergarten material in the Sunday school, let us use more from nature. The most devoted follower of Froebel may see that with him nature held the first place—that other material was an addition to be used when advantageous. There are two ways of using natural objects : according to the Pestalozzian object-lesson, which gives something to do by way of observation ; or, according to the Froebelian more active doing, by working with the thing itself ; both may be effectively used, though the latter is of greater value ; *e. g.*, it is better for the child to discover that an oat has two or three coverings by taking them off than for the teacher to make the discovery for him. Again, when the right conditions are made, the children will often have something to do in discovering truth, even if they do not actually handle material. And, as a result of some impression, they may at times be busy in finding and bringing to Sunday school a picture of some thing in relation to the preceding lesson ; they may also work out in a crude way a picture on the blackboard which will do more good sometimes than a more complete one made by the teacher. Thus in a variety of forms may the working principle of growth by self-action be applied.

In the kindergarten the children dramatize many stories, and thus in simple play express the truth by taking the different characters involved. This is one way of learning. Excellent for the kindergarten, is it a good way for the Sunday school ? We think not. It introduces the play element, which even for a little child is not always necessary in the time of story and

song, and this detracts from a wholesome reverence for the place. And even in the kindergarten there are some stories and songs that are better not dramatized, *e. g.*, the Christmas story. We have yet to see anything so sacred "played" by the children. As most of the Bible-school stories are of a sacred nature, we find here the chief reason for not following this method. It is a different matter if, in their interest, the children spontaneously play out these stories in their homes. Anything of this kind done from the simple motive of interest is good rather than bad, and if we hinder or prevent it, we put upon them a distinction they cannot appreciate.

In conserving the character of the Bible school discrimination needs to be made between the purely nature songs of the kindergarten and those of a spiritual character. The music of the kindergarten has been an untold help to the primary Sunday school. And there are now so many simple beautiful songs, full of spiritual suggestion, that selection may easily be made. A song of nature that does not lead to a higher thought may better be reserved to the kindergarten. For instance, the bright, merry one "All the birds have come again" suggests only the return of the spring, but such a song as "Waiting to grow," with the climax,

Nothing so small, nor hidden so well,
That God cannot find it, and presently tell
His sun where to shine and his rain where to go,
Helping, helping them grow,

suggests that, and with it a thought of the Father in heaven.

The more the Sunday-school primary teacher can enter into the general method and spirit of the true kindergartner in the management of the children, the better will be their training. But the sentimental manner, the constant "dear"-ing and fondling, supposed by some to emanate from the kindergarten, because teachers called by that name have indulged in these, need carefully to be avoided. The love which shows an element of strength appeals to the children far more than an emotional pampering. Simplicity, justice, and common-sense are three essentials in the general method of the Bible school, as of any other school.